

Elementary Education.

"Education," says Plato, "is the fairest thing that the best of men can ever have." A noble thought that has found an echo in the words of the French moralist who wrote "Pouvoir sans savoir est fort dangereux." No one doubts the truth of the foregoing. The point is how far is it being carried out in our own Province. From all appearances the maxim of the Swiss statesman, "Most of our children are born to poverty, but we take care that they shall not grow up in ignorance," is one sadly needed by our own educational authorities.

As is well known, last year the campaign, carried on by the press of the Province, raised such an upsurge that Mr. Flynn put "education" on one of his bannerets at the meeting in the Club on St. James Street, Montreal, and afterwards made it a plank in his platform. Much is said by him of the fact that \$50,000 per year is to be given annually to aid the elementary education of the Province, when, however, we hear the Hon. Mr. Hackett taking credit for economizing, basing his claim on the fact that the present Government has reduced the expenditure on night schools from \$50,000 to \$10,000, we are inclined to feel very doubtful, to say the least, of the good intent of the Government on this all-important subject. Even granting it the intent, what is the state of affairs in the Province that this \$50,000 is going to remedy? Let us see.

There can be no surer test of the value of the educational method in a country than the result of it on the masses. In Quebec, according to the census of 1891, there were only 68 out of every 100 adult persons in the Province that could read and write. In the neighboring Province of Ontario there were over 91, whilst just over the line, in the State of Vermont, the average is 93. The people of Quebec are not a whit behind their neighbors in any way. The fault is not in the people, but in the method. This is a question which must be faced. It is no use talking about new countries, and so forth. England, the mother land of the majority of the people of Ontario, is only 1.18 per cent. ahead of the daughter, whilst France, the mother land of the majority of the good people of Quebec, is no less than 24.56 in advance of her children.

In the city of Montreal there are some 24,789 illiterate persons, whilst in the County of Quebec nearly one-fifth of those over twenty are in the same unhappy plight. Again it will not do to talk about the youth of the country. In the colony of Victoria, in Australia, our junior by well nigh 200 years, the percentage of adult illiteracy is only 2.70 per cent.

Nor is this the worst. There are places in the Province where not only has there been no advance made in the last twenty years, but there has been a most lamentable retrogression. In Napierville, for instance, the census reveals the heart-rending fact that over 55 per cent. of the people over 20 are wrapped in ignorance, whilst in 1871 the percentage was only 15.1 per cent. The Education Department cannot be ignorant of the fact that in twenty years this county has gone back 39.8 per cent. In one place 95.7 per cent. of the people are French-Canadians, and yet in spite of this we read in the inspector's report that: "The study of French, although very important, is certainly one which leaves the most to be desired." The little ones are even neglected in their mother tongue. What more need be said?

The reports of the Inspectors simply teem with examples of what can only be traced to neglect of the worst kind. For example: In Nicolet we find children "who have already gone through the arithmetic several times, but who are not yet able to solve the most simple sums. They cannot even distinguish between division and multiplication;" and again, "they do not know the name of the river that flows throughout their own parish," or even the county they live in. This is simply appalling.

The root of most of the mischief is found in the report, which says "if we would have good schools, we must first of all commence by granting diplomas only to those able to teach READING, WRITING AND THE ELEMENTS OF GRAMMAR AND ARITHMETIC."

Another Inspector says: "It is impossible to impress order on the minds of children who, when in the most plastic state, have constantly before them an object lesson in disorder, unkempt, uncared for school premises." From Perce we hear: "These schools are closed too fre-